



The state capital budget makes investments in our communities, and we were pleased to secure \$2.6 million in the new budget to help the city of Tieton with its water system needs.

14TH DISTRICT LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Building and maintaining the 14th Legislative District

With the passage of the capital budget and several other bills, we helped secure more than \$56 million for projects in the Yakima area. We're proud to call the 14th District home, and this money will help ensure that our communities stay clean, safe and beautiful for years to come.

- Approximately \$15 million for enhancements to the Capitol Theatre, which is a key issue for the renovation of downtown Yakima.
- \$1 million for the Yakima Downtown Futures Initiative, Phase 3.
- Approximately \$10 million for tourism. When the bonds on the SunDome at the fairgrounds are paid off, we can continue to utilize the hotel/motel tax revenue stream until 2021 for buildings or facilities that promote agriculture or tourism.
- \$200,000 for the YWCA to convert the nursing home it purchased into a shelter for victims of domestic violence.
- \$500,000 to fund a public-private partnership between the Opportunities Industrialization Center, a nonprofit group in Yakima, the Farm Bureau and the Growers League that will provide instruction and hands-on safety training for farm workers.
- \$135,000 to study the potential for sugar beets to be used as biofuel and livestock feed. The sugar beets we grow in Washington have the highest per-acre potential for ethanol production. Sugar beets can produce 800 gallons per acre, whereas corn produces 280 gallons per acre. In addition, due to its new role producing biofuel, corn has nearly become cost prohibitive as livestock feed. The process of turning sugar beets into ethanol produces a

great by-product to be used as livestock feed. Plus, the infrastructure needed to convert the beets to fuel would provide more jobs for Eastern Washington.

- \$550,000 for researching ways to replace organo-phosphate insecticides. After 2012, our state will no longer be able to use organo-phosphate insecticides. Without new products, the entire fruit industry is at risk. If just one insect is found in an exported shipment, foreign markets such as Taiwan will close their doors to our fruit. This research is very important to find safer and softer products that will do the same job as organo-phosphates.
- \$200,000 to fund the continuation of environmental impact studies for the Pine Hollow reservoir project, which will be essential over the next two years.
- \$250,000 for repairs to the South Naches Irrigation District bulkhead. This was a last-minute budget request for the small irrigation district which couldn't afford repairs. Without the bulkhead repairs, homes and lives are placed at risk.
- \$1.5 million to fund the expansion of Valley Mall Boulevard from Union Gap to the airport.
- \$2.6 million for water system infrastructure assistance in the city of Tieton.
- \$16.3 million for Yakima Valley Technical Skills Center.
- \$2.4 million for Yakima Valley Community College.
- \$300,000 to repair Camp Prime Time, which provides recreation for seriously ill and disabled children and their families.
- \$594,000 to upgrade the field and make other improvements at the ballpark where the Yakima Bears play.



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LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SEN. JIM CLEMENTS**REP. MARY SKINNER****REP. CHARLES ROSS**

Summer 2007

Dear Friends,

A week after the 2007 legislative session ended we spent part of a beautiful spring day in Tieton, first to recognize the many people who helped that city rebound following the disastrous failure of its water system last fall, and second, for an open and informal meeting with our constituents at the local diner.

The Tieton ceremony reminded us over and over how people up and down the Yakima Valley will pull together to meet a challenge. Later, as we had lunch and discussed the Legislature's recent actions, came several reminders that Yakima Valley legislators – all nine of us, from three districts – also pull together, combining our experience to represent the people we are so honored to serve.

This report goes into more detail about the legislation we offered, and actions taken by the Legislature. We hope you can take a few moments to read it. Please contact us if you want to share your opinion or ask questions about legislation and issues facing the Legislature. Each of us is just a phone call away!

Sincerely,



Sen. Jim Clements



Rep. Mary Skinner



Rep. Charles Ross

The new lineup for the 14th Legislative District proved as solid as expected for the 2007 session. Jim Clements, now anchoring the team from the state Senate, continued to be a strong voice for the district, as he was during six terms in the House of Representatives. Mary Skinner, the senior state representative in her seventh term, returned to her position among the House of Representatives' leaders without missing a beat, after responding positively to cancer treatment. Charles Ross used his experience as a former mayor to step up in Olympia and quickly establish himself as an advocate for public safety in his first term as a state representative.



Progress made toward stopping gang violence

On May 8, the governor signed my gang violence bill, Senate Bill 5987, into law. The bill was amended to only create a task force to study the issue. Although the attorney general came to me asking me to sponsor a bill that would put tougher penalties in place for gang violence and graffiti-related offenses, this amended version was the end product. Neither of us liked the change, but, as a beginning, we took what we could get. This information-seeking group will be comprised of members of local law enforcement, experts in gang prevention and juvenile justice, county prosecutors, municipal attorneys, district and superior court judges, prison administrators, and probation officers. They will be working the rest of this year to identify ways to combat the problem of gang violence and graffiti in our state, which is a growing concern in the Yakima area.

Giving back to our veterans

In January of this year, Maj. Alan Johnson was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq. As a civilian, Maj. Johnson was a 15-year employee of the Yakima County Department of Corrections. When he died, his wife, Victoria, was not able to receive her husband's full death benefit from the state because, under present law, his deployment was considered a voluntary quit. Victoria and I testified in favor of an amendment to House Bill 1266, which determines who is eligible for death benefits from Washington retirement systems. My amendment included employees who were killed while serving in the United States armed forces. On May 15, the governor signed HB 1266 into law, allowing Victoria to collect her late husband's death benefit. It was a pleasure to assist Victoria in this effort. I thank her and Maj. Johnson for sacrificing so much for this great country. My thanks also extend to Reps. Skinner and Ross for their help in the House.

Issues we have yet to resolve

BUDGET – The two-year budget passed this session increases spending by 15 percent, while revenue is only projected to grow by 7 percent. In the next legislative session, I'll be working to reduce the size of government and provide you with some type of property tax relief. For example, I'm going to propose a bill that would require the reduction of the state's portion of your property tax whenever state spending reaches more than one and a half times the rate of inflation. This will require the state, when it decides to spend more, to reduce your property taxes equally.

WASL – We are long overdue to remove passing the WASL as a requirement for high school graduation. The Legislature should have done that several years ago. Under the WASL, there is no equal opportunity, equal treatment or equal justice. The state is allowing some people to bypass the WASL for graduation by taking an "alternative assessment." But in our district, there will be thousands of children who won't graduate because there is no alternative assessment for them. Instead, they'll be given a "certificate of completion" after high school, stating they have passed all of their classes and completed all of their coursework, but they still won't graduate. It is my priority to treat all children equally in the educational system by solving this terrible problem. The WASL is a dismal failure, and it needs to be amended in the 2008 legislative session.

TRANSPORTATION – In the past several years, voters in the state of Washington were promised certain transportation projects if they approved several sweeping gas tax increases. These gas tax increases and the ability to complete major projects were severely overmarketed, politically. Megaprojects like the SR-520 Bridge and the Alaskan Way Viaduct were supposed to be funded by these tax increases, but instead we're facing the possibility of massive tolls over the next 40 years to pay for these projects. There are better solutions out there, and as a member of the Senate Transportation Committee, I'll be working hard to find those solutions to get projects completed on time and on budget, as promised.

Fish on! Stocking Wenas Lake

The rainbow trout are swimming again in Wenas Lake. Originally, the lake was not going to be stocked by the Department of Fish and Wildlife this summer, as a 25-year public access agreement between the department and the Wenas Irrigation District (WID) had expired. Sen. Janéa Holmquist and I helped broker an arrangement that will allow fishing in the lake through the end of the year. In fact, I was honored to have the department ask me to be the first to open the valve, sending more than 4,000 rainbow trout into their new home. I will be working with WID this summer and beyond to find ways of keeping the lake stocked in the future.

Sen. Clements: Looking ahead...

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TRUST FUND

– I’m working on a major piece of legislation for next year that is similar to a bill I proposed this year (Senate Bill 5999). It would restructure the way the state unemployment insurance trust fund is maintained. Right now, the trust fund has in excess of \$3 billion in it, and is still growing. This amount is more than the fund needs to sustain itself.

My bill would keep the fund balanced between the potential of unemployment compensation for people being laid off and the tax stream coming in to support that. Right now, we have a tremendous waterfall of tax dollars coming in, but there is very little need for unemployment compensation. We are experiencing the lowest unemployment rate in years at 4.4 percent, yet we’re taxing employers in our state as if we’re at 9 percent unemployment. Hopefully, the governor will

agree to have Employment Security consider this bill.

This legislation would benefit all employers and employees in the state by setting up a fair and consistent taxing system that provides continuity and consistency in our tax rates.

ELUDING A POLICE VEHICLE – Next year, I am going to sponsor a bill that would increase the penalties for someone who eludes a police vehicle. Democrats sponsored an eluding bill this session in the House, but when the bill came before the Senate, no one took the time to adequately address the problem. I managed to get it voted out of Judiciary, but it died in Ways and Means.

Offenders know if they can outrun the police or create an extremely dangerous situation while they flee, the police will call off the chase. The Legislature needs to let criminals know they will no longer get a free ride for eluding, but rather will be subject to serious penalties and not just a slap on the wrist. Criminals need to fear the penalty for their actions.

NEWS FROM

REP. CHARLES ROSS



I came away from my first session in the Legislature feeling honored to be one of your representatives. I hated to be away from my wife and two young sons for the better part of four months, but improving their future is why I am serving in this office ... their future and the future of other families throughout the Yakima Valley and the state. The decisions made at the Capitol this year and next will affect our state for many years to come.

A good example is public safety. Protecting citizens is a fundamental obligation of government, and I promised my constituents I would do all I could in Olympia to make our communities safer places. I followed through by introducing or co-sponsoring more than 20 public safety bills this session.

The first bill I introduced as a legislator, House Bill 1198, would have dramatically increased penalties for drivers who attempt to elude law enforcement officers. This commitment was inspired by the tragic story of two young Yakima men, Bobby Aguilar and Edgar Mendoza, who died after their car was struck by a vehicle that was being chased by police.

I want criminals who see a patrol car’s lights flashing in their rear view mirror to ask themselves, when they’re deciding whether to hit the accelerator: Is trying to outrun this officer worth a year in prison on top of any other sentence I might receive?

Neither my bill nor a similar bill I co-sponsored passed this session, but I will work to pass one next year.

There are too many examples of felons committing crimes after they have been released back into a community to finish out their sentences under what’s called “community supervision.”

I was appalled that the state Department of Corrections freed dozens of felons due to overcrowding at two King County jails shortly after I and other lawmakers publicly criticized the poor supervision of felons released early into the community. I co-sponsored the “Families Before Felons” bill to freeze such releases and crack down on felons who violate the conditions of their release. Unfortunately, this legislation also did not pass.

In response to the rise of criminal gang activity in our communities, I co-sponsored legislation in the House (House Bill 2224) that would give law enforcement and prosecutors new tools to go after gangs, with special attention to the “tagging” (graffiti) that is a fundamental part of gang culture.

Senate Bill 5987, the version Sen. Clements sponsored in the Senate, passed the Legislature but only after it was turned into a bill that directs a work group put together by law enforcement to recommend changes in the law. It’s not what I hoped for, but we’ll see what the study group proposes prior to the 2008 session.

The big win for public safety this session was the passage of House Bill 1001, which strengthens penalties for auto theft. State law doesn’t hold serious consequences for juvenile car thieves until they’ve been convicted a seventh time. The legislation I supported would put a juvenile in jail for the *third* auto theft conviction. This new law is a good first step that’s been a long time coming.

One of my early votes on the floor of the House was for House Bill 1168, which prohibits protesters from coming within 500 feet of a funeral. As a Navy veteran who now works as a funeral director, I’m proud to have helped pass this bill, and glad it apparently discouraged a protest planned for Yakima.

This was a busy first session, but I was able to keep up thanks to my background as mayor and council member in Naches and because Rep. Skinner and Sen. Clements are great “seatmates” who really make our legislative team a strong one. I’m glad to hear from you and ready to help if I can. It’s a privilege to serve you!

NEWS FROM REP. MARY SKINNER



A personal note

Thank you for all of the prayers, cards, letters, and telephone calls you have provided since my diagnosis of colon cancer in 2006.

As you know, after my surgery, I underwent intensive radiation and chemotherapy treatments. After extensive testing in December, my doctor told me that my cancer is in remission. I still have “maintenance chemo” treatments twice a month to ensure that the cancer does not return. I assure you I feel great and I’m so pleased to be back serving you.

This session has been wonderful for me. I was honored to be chosen by my caucus in January to deliver the Republican response to Gov. Gregoire’s State-of-the-State address. The response was televised throughout the state of Washington. This would not have been possible had it not been for your prayers. God bless you for all of your support. It is truly a privilege to serve you.

Cancer screening bill approved

Every year more than 3,000 Washington residents are diagnosed with colon cancer. This disease claims about 1,000 annually in our state. The key to saving lives is early detection. However, many people do not request regular colorectal screenings because their insurance doesn’t cover this. Often, by the time cancer is detected, it has spread to other organs of the body.

Before leaving Yakima for the legislative session in Olympia, I told many constituents that I wanted to do something to prevent colon cancer from stealing the lives of other Washingtonians. I teamed up with Rep. Phyllis Gutiérrez-Kenney. Now we have a new law that will allow people to access lab tests and screening.

Beginning July 1, 2008, House Bill 1337 will require health insurance to cover screening for individuals 50 years and older and for those under 50 who are at high risk of colorectal cancer. The frequency of the screenings will be determined by the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and through doctors’ consultations with their individual patients.

This measure, which was signed into law by the governor, will help to save countless lives in our state.

Skinner’s poet laureate bill becomes law

Our nation’s capitol and 40 states have official poet laureates. This year, the Legislature approved a bill I introduced which makes Washington the 41st to have a state poet laureate.

A poet laureate is the state’s official spokesman/woman in prose. Our poet laureate will travel into our communities and schools throughout Washington to help people express themselves through poetry. This will especially increase literacy and inspire language arts among young people, giving a creative and positive outlet to express themselves.

Under House Bill 1279, which was signed into law, the Washington State Arts Commission (of which I am a member) is charged with establishing and administering the poet laureate program. A committee appointed by the commission will recommend a poet laureate for the first two-year term. The commission, with the governor’s approval, will make the final selection. The measure includes an initial stipend of \$30,000 for the 2007-09 biennium to cover the poet laureate’s expenses.

I was honored to be joined at the bill signing by Ed Stover of Yakima who wrote a poem specifically for the occasion and presented it to Gov. Gregoire. You may read the poem on my website at: <http://www.houserepublicans.wa.gov/Skinner/newsroom/070419.htm>.



Rep. Mary Skinner, and Washington Poets Association Secretary Ed Stover, both of Yakima, present Gov. Christine Gregoire with Stover’s poem “Waiting for the Poets” following the signing of House Bill 1279. The bill, prime-sponsored by Skinner, establishes the Washington state poet laureate program.